

Interview Date: 11/17/2016

Interviewee: Sister Margaret Mary O'Rourke

Interviewer: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University; Kelby Thwaits, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University; Mary Trunk, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University; Laura Townsend, Production Coordinator, CSJ Institute.

Location: Villa Carondelet, Los Angeles, California.

Transcription Date: 01/06/2017

Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

[00:00:00.00] [Director's comments].

[00:00:54.12] Full name and age. Sister Margaret Mary O'Rourke, age 86.

[00:01:05.02] Early life and family. Born San Diego, California. Moving as a child--looking forward to something new.

[00:02:43.15] Early religious experience. Casual Catholic. Epichia [Catholic concept of equity]. Brother who died early. Parents.

[00:04:14.18] Meeting Sisters of St. Joseph. St. Brigid's grammar school in Los Angeles, fourth grade. First experience of seeing full habit. Having communion twice in one day. Cultural differences in Catholic experience.

[00:06:46.08] Attending school and studying. High school at St. Mary's Academy, Los Angeles. Women as leaders. Team captainships, student body president.

[00:08:00.08] Early vocation. Teacher at St. Brigid's in fifth grade. Experience as girl's camp counselor. "Discernment". Women as a man's possession.

[00:10:56.09] Hopes of being a Sister. Wanting to teach. Attraction to CSJs--inclusiveness.

[00:13:14.06] Family reaction to vocation.

[00:14:15.29] Early religious life. Postulate at St. Mary's Academy. Being without responsibility. Receiving the habit. Mount faculty during novitiate. Sr. Mary Patricia [Sexton (1912-1986)], English faculty. Sr. Laurentia [Sister Mary Laurentia Digges (1910-1991)], English faculty. Sr. Mary Gerald [Leahy (1917-2004)], Biology faculty. Sr. Gertrude Joseph [Cook], Biology faculty. Sr. Rose de Lima [Lynch (1896-1986), Education faculty]. Sr. St. Francis [Sheerin, History faculty]. Sister Alice Marie [Cheap (1906-1984), Physical Sciences faculty].

[00:17:09.25] Influence of Sister Mary Gerald Leahy to her Biology major.

[00:17:55.03] [Director's comments.]

[00:20:23.15] Memories of Sister Mary Gerald Leahy. Lack of appreciation. Microbiology interest. Diversity and creativity of microorganisms. Books of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), Jesuit priest and paleontologist.

[00:23:58.24] Sense of separation of science and spirituality--"pray with what you know".

[00:26:29.20] Early ministries. Opening St. Jane Frances de Chantal School, North Hollywood, teaching second, fourth, sixth, seventh grades. Difficulties of teaching while school under construction. Faculty: Sister George Anne [Miller, aka Sister Janice Miller (1943-2010)?], first grade teacher. Mrs. [Schimmely], lay teacher, taught third grade. Sister Sarah Marie [??], principal.

[00:30:36.16] Community life in North Hollywood. Visitors. Other CSJ schools. Rule of silence. Teaching

music. Coaching sports teams.

[00:31:51.15] Decision to obtain advanced degree. Sister Josephine [Sister Mary Josephine Feeley, (1905-1991)?], provincial. Sister Marie Chapla [(1931-2016)]. Sister Cecile Therese Beresford. Working in lab with Sister Gertrude Joseph at the Mount while studying bacterial genetics at UCLA--letter from Cardinal forbidding any religious personnel study of genetics at a secular university. Attending UC Berkeley during Vatican II.

[00:36:09.08] Sixties and seventies at UC Berkeley. Vatican II and scientific research. Multi-cultural research group. Free speech movement. Bias in Hearst newspapers [William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951)]. Voter registration of African-Americans during Civil Rights Movement. Injustice in science academia. Mario Savio [(1942-1996), American political activist in Free Speech Movement]. Reaction of CSJs to participation in demonstrations.

[00:41:51.13] Impact of Vatican II. Division of opinion among CSJs about changes. Working in leadership with Sister Mary Brigid [Fitzpatrick] and Sister Grace Ann [??]. New York Times ad re: conscience and abortion ["A Catholic Statement on Pluralism and Abortion", New York Times advertisement, 10/07/1984]. Sister Miriam Therese [Larkin (1930-2010)?], CSJ superior.

[00:45:34.06] Learning canon law. Sister Clare Dunn [(-1981), Arizona State Rep.]. Sister Julie Marciacq, indicted by Federal Grand Jury on immigration charges. Compared to Sisters in Delano, California.

[00:50:07.14] Vatican II. Going back to original documents. Apostolic vs. monastic life. Being a "rebel". Founding in France as "subversive". Jean Pierre Médaille (1610-1669) and Sisters "living in hospital".

[00:54:15.03] "Rebel"--questioning and "not following the rule". Religion--"religio"--"unite".

[00:57:06.16] Teaching at the Mount. Experiencing the Bel Air Fire [1961]. Sister Eloise Therese [Mescall (1919-2001)]. Sister Rebecca [Sister Mary Rebecca Doan (1910-1999), Mount president].

[01:06:23.06] Ministry in Chile. Don Carlos González Cruchaga, Bishop of Talca. "Just be present". Dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet [(1915-2006)]. Sister Mary Ellen Kowalski. Sister Kathleen [??].

[01:11:06.11] Example project in Chile: catechism classes and other activities for special needs children--belief about children with "limitations" being the result of sin--child abuse. "Hogar Belén"--homes for special needs children. Partnering with communities vs doing for them.

[01:19:40.02] [Director's comments]. [Cut].

[01:20:05.14] In Chile 25 years, 1980s until 2013. Other stories from Chile. Sister Eileen ["Elena" Smits aka Sr. Rita Bernard (1935-2012)] work with women's groups with Sister Marie Loyola [Sanders (1914-1996)]. [Asuncion], 2nd grade school teacher in Chile trains them as "moderators" or "monitores" to motivate and aid women. Diocesan Synod--organizing discussion groups. Sister Rose Mary Haley [(1924-2012)], nurse--forming group of volunteers for home health visits. Joint religious group--Committee on Peace Justice and Ecology--formed eco-spirituality group, retreats, workshops, etc. Conspirando [feminist eco-spirituality group] and Capacitar [International] organizations. Pat [Cane, founder of Capacitar]. Conspirando [feminist magazine].

[01:30:10.00] Spirituality work. Mission-to-mission learning in both directions. Working in Curepto, Chile--learning from campesinos--"the other oxen". Image of God--love energy--strong attractor.

[01:33:55.05] Transition coming back to States. Community focus on self. "Dear neighbor". Charism awareness for students--unity and reconciliation.

[01:36:29.19] Ministries during retirement. Working at Presentation Learning Center in Watts. Translations in Spanish at Alexandria House. Homelessness.

[01:39:15.16] Greatest joys of religious life. Having Sisters. Opportunity for experiences--education, travel. Life of freedom.

[01:40:30.22] Other reflections. Helping to found Doheny Campus. Sister Rebecca Doan. Working with Marymount and Loyola Universities. Need for AA program instead of masters program. Potential students. Cuban Teacher Training masters program [(1960s-1970s)].

[01:44:46.01] Challenges from others merging science and religious life. Eco-spirituality group in Chile. Translating works into Spanish: Thomas Berry [CP, PhD (1914-2009), ecotheologian]. Brian Swimme [(1950-), professor California Institute of Integral Studies], book "The universe is a green dragon: Reading the meaning in the cosmic story". Matthew Fox [(1940-) priest and theologian]. Counseling parents of first communion and confirmation children on science and religion. Separating faith from doctrine. Using roleplaying to teach the Bible. Cultural interpretations of creation myths.

[01:53:38.12] End of interview.

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[00:00:00.00] [Director's comments].

[00:00:48.00] INTERVIEWER: Would you start by telling us your full name and your age?

[00:00:59.18] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Oh. Sister Margaret Mary O'Rourke, and I'm eighty-six.

[00:01:05.12] INTERVIEWER: Sister Margaret, would you tell us a little bit about where you were born, and where you grew up?

[00:01:11.03] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: All right. Where I was born--San Diego, California. My parents had come west during the Depression [The Great Depression (1929-39)] because they heard there were jobs for teachers. And my Mom got a job teaching in San Diego and that's where I was born. A couple months after, my Dad finally got some work with the bank. But in those days you had to go wherever they sent you. So by the time I was ten years old I had lived in San Diego, Oceanside, Hermosa Beach, Palm Springs, Fillmore and finally Los Angeles. So I just say I'm from Southern California. [laughs].

[00:02:03.13] INTERVIEWER: What was it like growing up moving around so much?

[00:02:06.01] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Well, of course it was hard, and I would cry if I had--when I had to leave my friends and my dog and everything. But you know, the wonderful thing that happened: my Dad would always try to find out something about the new place. And so when I'd be crying, he'd say, "Oh yes, but if we never went there, you'd never have this experience." So I got in the habit of looking forward to something new instead of focusing on what I had to leave. [laughs].

[00:02:43.03] INTERVIEWER: Were you a very religious family?

[00:02:46.12] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Yes and no. We went to Mass, and we went to Novenas. My Mom was kind of religious in her own way. My Dad was more I guess you'd call an "Irish Catholic" type of Catholic. But my Dad went to a Jesuit college. He worked his way through Creighton [University, Omaha, Nebraska] cooking. And he learned about "epichia" [Catholic concept of unity]. And so I learned that if the rule didn't apply, you just ignored it. [laughs].

[00:03:28.18] INTERVIEWER: That sounds very Jesuit, doesn't it?

[00:03:30.23] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Uh-hm. Very. [laughs]. Very Jesuit. But I like it. [laughs].

[00:03:37.09] INTERVIEWER: And you had a brother that you never really knew.

[00:03:42.24] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Right. My brother died because of a malformed heart valve. He would have been about a year and a half older than I am. My parents married late in life. My Mom had her profession, which was unusual in those days. And my Dad was a real free spirit. He wanted to do everything possible before he committed to a marriage. [laughs].

[00:04:15.09] INTERVIEWER: When did you first meet the Sisters of St. Joseph?

[00:04:18.14] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Oh. That was quite an experience. [laughs]. I came--

we moved to Los Angeles toward the end of my fourth grade. And it was--my mother enrolled me in St. Brigid's grammar school in Los Angeles. And it's the first time I ever remember seeing a person in a full habit. Maybe I had, but I had never remembered it. So that was quite a culture shock. And I didn't understand a lot of what was going on. I mean, we weren't--my family wasn't heavy into rules and laws. [laughs]. And so things kept happening, like my Dad took me to school early one time because it was raining, and there was a Mass going on. So I went to Communion. And then during the day we had a school Mass. So I went to Communion again. And at lunch time I was telling my friends how wonderful this was--I could go to Communion twice. Well, you would think I had leprosy. They all ran and told this lady in this strange garb this terrible thing I had done. And so she ends up giving me this sermon about how awful that--I had--we had had catechism, and we only had Mass in Fillmore maybe twice a month or something, because the priest had all these other little communities. And so the emphasis was go to Communion whenever possible. So here she is telling me this is a terrible thing to do, and that kept happening all the time. We--it was pretty much a Mexican Catholic community in Fillmore. And the church was our Father's house. Everybody talked in church. And then all of a sudden I'm in this weird culture where you can't talk in church. So that first--those first months--that first half year--I kept going home and saying, "Have we changed churches?" I just--I couldn't get it together. [laughs].

[00:06:48.12] INTERVIEWER: Did you like school? Did you like studying?

[00:06:50.05] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Oh I loved school. Yeah. I loved school. I loved studying. I loved the companionship. Being an only child, I was the one who always had to go out and find companionship. So school was just a built in natural for me. Yeah. I enjoyed it. [laughs].

[00:07:14.11] INTERVIEWER: Where did you go to high school?

[00:07:16.13] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: I went to St. Mary's Academy. A number of us from St. Brigid's went to St. Mary's Academy. And that was a good choice I think, because it gave women--gave young girls a chance to be leaders and to do what maybe they couldn't have done in a mixed school.

[00:07:40.26] INTERVIEWER: Did you take advantage of some of that, having leadership roles?

[00:07:47.07] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: I did. I was often captain of a team. I was student body President. Yeah, I gave some leadership. [laughs].

[00:08:02.04] INTERVIEWER: So when did you first start thinking about becoming a Sister?

[00:08:06.16] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Probably I could identify two different times thinking about becoming a Sister. In the fifth and sixth grade at St. Brigid's, we had a teacher who we just absolutely loved. I probably had a crush on her. And so although I went through this few months--half year of thinking these were strange creatures, all of a sudden here was somebody who I really liked. And so I thought about it then. Then I didn't think too much about it later. During my high school years, I was a counselor at a girl's camp up near Arrowhead--Running Springs. And we had just--we had a wonderful--a great group of--we were oh probably between sixteen and twenty-three, almost all of us. Mostly women, couple of guys to do the heavy work. And on our nights off we would hang out in the counselor's tent. And I don't think any of us knew the word "discernment", but actually that was a fabulous discernment group, because we talked about everything. There were even two lesbian counselors, which was--in the forties--was not all that--they were not all that common. We talked about all kinds of possibilities for the future. And I think it was there that I realized when my boyfriend said "my girl", "my chica", I had a kind of negative response, whereas many of my girlfriends thought that was the most wonderful thing in the world, to be somebody's girl. And so we talked about stuff like that. And I realized I felt like a possession. And I didn't want to be "possessed"--I wanted to be free. And I also wanted to be a teacher. And because I knew the Sisters of St. Joseph--many--were teachers, I knew that would be a good possibility. And so anyway four of us from that camp counselor group decided that, "Well, let's try it. If it's not right, we can leave." Well three of us are still here. [laughs]. So that was a real blessing in my life.

[00:10:55.01] INTERVIEWER: Sounds like you were able to really dream about what was possible.

[00:11:01.13] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Um-hm.

[00:11:02.01] INTERVIEWER: And you wanted to be a teacher. What other hopes about being a Sister did that ignite in you? Can you say more broadly what that would mean for you?

[00:11:10.16] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: To be a Sister? Well, I think--from the time I was little I knew I wanted to be a teacher. That part of my vocation was very clear. And so I think seeing that the Sisters of St. Joseph were good teachers, and I would be able to be prepared for that, was probably just the strongest attraction for me at that age.

[00:11:48.02] INTERVIEWER: And you mentioned at first they were kind of strange beings, until you met one that you really liked.

[00:11:56.00] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Yeah.

[00:11:56.25] INTERVIEWER: Do you have other perceptions as you got to know them better about what they were like as a group? What started to draw you beyond the teaching?

[00:12:06.17] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: The teaching? Well, when we would be practicing for volleyball or basketball or whatever at St. Mary's Academy, there was always a teacher on charge, because there were boarders. And they were so friendly. I mean even if we weren't a boarder, we could still have the cookies that they put out. So that kind of inclusiveness, that kind of friendliness I think was very attractive to me. I never really went shopping around. Like I know some people visited various communities. It just seemed like a natural fit, so why go looking elsewhere?

[00:12:58.08] INTERVIEWER: Did you enter after St. Mary's Academy or did you go on to college. Oh you went to college--

[00:13:01.04] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Yeah, I entered after. My poor mother was left getting my trunk in order because I was at camp a week before I entered.

[00:13:13.01] INTERVIEWER: What did your parents think about your decision?

[00:13:16.11] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Well my mother did not approve at all. She just--I guess where she had grown up, probably her experience of Sisters in religion was negative. She never talked much about it. But I guess she thought they were confined and that they just did housework, I don't know. But anyway, she didn't like the idea. And she tried every way. She said, "I'll buy you a car"--I mean she offered all these things if I would just please go to college. And I said, "But I can go to college." So I dragged her up to see the provincial. And I got the provincial to promise her that I would go to college and I would be a teacher. So that made it a little easier. My Dad--he was very supportive. [laughs].

[00:14:13.24] INTERVIEWER: What do you remember about being a postulant, the early days? Were you still at St. Mary's Academy?

[00:14:21.16] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: [laughs]. We were--yes, we were still at St. Mary's Academy. And I guess--being a postulant--at first, being confined to one place was hard. And at the same time not having any responsibility was great. [laughs]. I realized that I had had a lot of responsibility. You know, taking care of children all summer, with--some were from rich families, you know spoiled--making sure they didn't drown or get lost or--. When I think back, you know, it was a big responsibility for teenagers. Being a lifeguard at the lake, and trying to get things to happen at my high school as student body President. All of a sudden I realized, "Oh, this is kind of nice, not to have any responsibility." So that's sort of what I remember about the postulate. [laughs].

[00:15:37.18] INTERVIEWER: Do you remember receiving the habit, and what that felt like?

[00:15:44.08] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Um-hm. I wasn't overjoyed to wear the habit. I liked our--if I had to choose a habit--I liked ours. But it wasn't a big thing for me. I was ready to finish the

novitiate. And we went up to the Mount from March until summer school to study. And that was a new adventure. So it was very positive. And of course waiting for what's going to happen--where are we going to go. [laughs].

[00:16:31.29] INTERVIEWER: Do you remember some of your faculty from the Mount when you were a student?

[00:16:39.00] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Oh yes. Sr. Mary Patricia [Sexton (1912-1986)] in the English department. Sister Laurentia [Sister Mary Laurentia Digges (1910-1991)] in the English department. Sister Mary Gerald [Leahy (1917-2004)] in Biology. Sister Gertrude Joseph [Cook] in Biology. Sister Rose de Lima [Lynch (1896-1986), Education faculty]. Sister St. Francis [Sheerin, History faculty]. Sister Alice Marie [Cheap (1906-1984), Physical Sciences faculty]. Oh yes. I have wonderful memories.

[00:17:09.00] INTERVIEWER: You've mentioned Sister Mary Gerald to me before as being one of--a very important [unintelligible] for you.

[00:17:17.04] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Yes. Because when they asked us what did we want to have as a major, it was interesting. Three of my--three of us chose Math. And one ended up in Math, one ended up in Music, and I ended up in Biology. How they decided that I have no idea. But I am forever grateful, because my first class with Mary Gerald I just fell in love with Microbiology. There was no doubt after that. [laughs].

[00:17:54.26] [Director's comments].

[00:20:25.21] INTERVIEWER: We were talking about Sister Mary Gerald.

[00:20:28.02] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Oh yes. Okay. You know she taught more in lab than she did in lecture. And so she taught through allowing us to have experiences, rather than just book knowledge. She was never recognized really as a good teacher. And I think her time away in Israel at the university where she did much of her research was really a blessing for her, because she felt appreciated there, whereas she didn't always feel appreciated at the Mount. [laughs].

[00:21:20.29] INTERVIEWER: Do you remember what it--what was it about microbiology that caught your imagination or attention?

[00:21:29.25] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: I guess discovering a whole new world that I had never known about before. And then seeing the tremendous diversity and also experiencing the creativity of these little creatures--things that they invented. We think we're so smart. [laughs]. And to see the amazing things that these one-celled creatures had invented over the years. And then, of course, at the same time Pierre [Teilhard] de Chardin's [(1881-1955)] books began coming out. So I think it was the two things--the simultaneity of both of those things that just caught my interest. And that was it for the rest of my life. [laughs].

[00:22:29.28] INTERVIEWER: Would you share a little bit more specifically about Chardin, for those who don't know?

[00:22:36.08] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Well, he was a Jesuit, a paleontologist, and not accepted in his world. He spent many, many years in China doing studies--paleontology--and became a very prolific writer. And realized--this was back in the '20s--he realized that the Church--the hierarchical Church--was not speaking a language that many people could understand anymore--that they were totally out of touch with most of what was being discovered. So he began writing to try to correct that, and was condemned. He could not be--his writings could not be published. And so it was only after his death in the '50s that immediately his writings began to be translated and available. And so I remember reading "The Phenomenon of Man" and thinking, "Oh, yes. This is exactly what we need."

[00:24:00.16] INTERVIEWER: So for you, that--there was never that separation of science and spirituality or faith or--

[00:24:08.15] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Well, yes, actually there was. I remember in probably the late '50s when I began teaching at the Mount--Sister Laurentia and I had been invited to give a talk on Spirituality at some big convention in San Diego. And I remember lying on my bed in the dorms up at Chalon thinking, "What can I talk about?" Because I still felt like I was living in two worlds, with one foot here and one foot there. And it was like an inspiration came to me, "Well, pray with what you know." So I thought, "Well that could be very interesting." So I thought about--this was the tumultuous times of changes. So I thought about I would be a carbon atom, and I would pray like a carbon atom. And I would pray about who can I bond with as a carbon atom--other carbons--and who could I bond with as oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen. So I started praying that way--imagining. And so when I went to San Diego, that's what I shared. [laughs]. I said, "I just discovered this new spirituality that I'm using, and it's working for me." Well, people came up afterwards and said, "Thank you so much! We have exactly the same problem. We feel like we're living in two different worlds--feel like we're schizophrenic." So yes, I did live through a time when I had a very difficult time getting the two worlds together.

[00:26:19.27] INTERVIEWER: And then when you discovered Chardin did that move that--

[00:26:24.22] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: That helped much, yes. Oh definitely. [laughs]. Yeah.

[00:26:30.22] INTERVIEWER: Tell us more about your early times in ministry. Before you taught at the Mount you taught--

[00:26:39.08] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Yes. When I first left the novitiate, my first assignment was to open a new school in North Hollywood--St. Jane Frances [de Chantal] parish--and with two other Sisters. So there were three of us--no actually there were four of us. And when we got there, we found out the school was not built yet. And also, the convent was not finished. We each had a bed--there was one dining room table, and there were four chairs. And it was a hundred degrees in the summer in September, and they were blacktopping the playground. [laughs]. So my first mission was an adventure. We just carried our chairs from the chapel to the dining room--[laughs]--to outside if we wanted to sit outside. We had no air conditioning or anything. I would put my sheets in the freezer in the morning, and I would take them out at night and I would lay one of them on the bed, and I could get to sleep, and then when I'd wake up I'd put the other cold sheet on and I could get to sleep again. So we were just surviving. Plus, the school was being built, but it was being built on top of an auditorium downstairs. Well three of us were in the auditorium teaching, with a curtain in between the classrooms. We all had sixty-five children. Sister George Anne [Miller, aka Sister Janice Miller (1943-2010)?] had the first grade; I was in the middle with the second grade; and Mrs. [Schimmely], a lay teacher was in the next one with the third grade. So the back of my class was listening to Mrs. Schimmely, the front of my class was listening to George Anne--[laughs]--it was quite an experience. And the--[laughs]--Sister Sarah Marie [??], the principal, had her fourth grade in father's garage. [laughs]. So we survived that way until November, and then we finally got into this wonderful new classroom and school. But you know, it built up a camaraderie--it built up a wonderful relationship. And the people were--you know, the Valley was just growing by leaps and bounds. The families were just wonderful and so helpful. By the time I left there, five years later, I had taught--because we added grades every year--so I taught second, the next year I taught fourth, the next year I taught sixth, the next year I taught seventh, and I stayed in seventh. But by that time we had already doubled again up to the fourth grade. [laughs]. And we always had sixty-five. The classrooms were built-- for fire regulations--for sixty-five. And one day Father [Thomas] Lahart--the pastor--came over and he said, "You know, so-and-so's moving". And I said, "Yes, I know." He said, "Well, guess what. The next on the waiting list are twins." [laughs]. So I had sixty-six. But yes, they were wonderful years.

[00:30:36.07] INTERVIEWER: What was the style of community like--community living like during that time?

[00:30:41.21] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: It was good. We had visitors--we had a lot of visitors. There were CSJ schools all over the Valley at that time and we would get together and celebrate together.

[00:31:05.11] INTERVIEWER: Were you still keeping silence and--

[00:31:10.12] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Yeah, pretty much we still had those same rules, yeah.



And it was very busy. I taught music before and after school--besides preparing a new grade every year. [laughs]. I coached all the girls' teams--we won the archdiocesan baseball championship one year. I was scorekeeper for the boys' games. And so there was never a dull moment. [laughs].

[00:31:51.27] INTERVIEWER: At some point you continued your studies back--so that you could teach at the Mount. Was that--

[00:31:57.18] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Yes.

[00:31:58.10] INTERVIEWER: So how was that decision made that you would go on for advanced degree?

[00:32:04.27] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: By the time that happened, Sister Josephine [Sister Mary Josephine Feeley, (1905-1991)?], who had been principal at St. Mary's Academy when I was student body president--we had a very interesting relationship to say the least. [laughs]. We weren't always in agreement with everything. But we both respected each other. She was provincial by the time. So my guess is that she suggested that I go on for studies. That would be my guess. And so what happened was I came up to Carondelet Center, and at time there were about five of us--[Sister] Marie Chapla [(1931-2016)] who just recently died was studying at UCLA--there were a couple--oh, Therese--[Sister] Cecile Therese Beresford was studying at UCLA--but there were about five of us living there. Some of us were studying half-time, so I began doing labs for Sister Gertrude Joseph at the Mount and studying half-time at UCLA. And then a very strange thing happened. [laughs]. One day, the provincial called me in and said, "What are you majoring in?" And I said, "Bacterial genetics." And she said, "Oh, you can't do that." And I said, "Well, that's what you sent me to study--microbiology." She said, "Well we just got a letter from the Cardinal saying that no religious could study genetics in a secular university. So could you call it something else?" [laughs]. I said, "No I can't call it something else." And so she said, "Well, maybe you'll have to go somewhere else." I had always wanted to go to Berkeley. And I never thought I would ever have a chance. So I just listened while she was saying, "You know, all this hanky-panky going on at Catholic U and Notre Dame, you know, Sisters and Brothers getting together and I'm really worried about our Sisters going there." So I thought, "Oh, here's my chance." [laughs]. I said, "Well, you know I could go to Berkeley because it would be much cheaper and it would be a good education and you wouldn't have to worry." So she said, "Oh." So I took that as a yes--[laughs]--so I applied to Berkeley, got accepted, and about two months later I get another call. She says, "You know, I'm worried about you losing your faith at Berkeley." [laughs]. So I said, "Well, you know I've already applied and I just need one physics class. So could I just do that for the summer?" "Okay, yes. You can do that." So off I went for the summer and I just never came back. [laughs]. And those were absolutely fabulous years. Those were the years of the Vatican II--those were the years of the Free Speech Movement [1964-1965 academic year at UC Berkeley]--it was just an absolutely marvelous time to be at an international university. I learned--we used to say if we just didn't have to go to class we could get a more--education.

[00:36:09.22] INTERVIEWER: Would you say more about that--what that meant for you to be engaged at that time?

[00:36:16.02] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Well, for instance my research group was a New York Jewess, a Venezuelan revolutionary Catholic, a WASP--white American Protestant, older guy--myself, and [Sung Tzu] a Korean Buddhist. So just hanging out with those people was an education in itself. And then the whole Free Speech Movement was such an eye-opener. To see the control that the Hearst papers [newspapers owned by William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951)] had at that time. I mean, we already knew--we finally subscribed to the Christian Science Monitor because there was no alternative news in the Bay Area. And then to see what that meant in daily life--the day--you know, the young people had come back from voter registration in the South. And they had set up tables outside the University to continue the voter registration. And then the day the police moved in and tore down those tables--that was kind of a wake-up call--to think, "That's real--I'm seeing this really happening, that you can't allow voter registration." And so we realized the seriousness of what was happening. And we were also aware of some injustices going on. Like we knew a young man in the physics department who was never passed on his orals because he was such a good researcher. His professor was using his work under the professor's name. We knew Philosophy--we knew that unless you sold your soul to "logical positivism", you didn't get your degree in Philosophy either. And then there was a social science area where we knew some injustices. So when Mario Savio

[(1942-1996), American political activist in Free Speech Movement] called the meeting to mobilize against the voter injustice, those were the departments where everybody just came flowing out, because they saw a way to include or be able to speak up for the injustice that was going on. And then, to see what the Hearst papers did with everything. Like the day Mario Savio and five others got out of jail, the president of the university called for a meeting--an open meeting--in the Bowl. And both the student body president and Mario Savio asked for time to talk, and they were both denied. He said, "This is my meeting and that's it." And so when the president finished, he turned around and walked toward the back of the stage with somebody--I think it was the student body president--I don't remember, but I think so. Mario Savio realized the juice was still on--the microphone. So he jumped up on the stage and began speaking. What happened was, he's speaking, the president turned around like this [makes turning gesture with hand]--and the headlines on the Hearst newspaper the next day--Mario Savio grabs microphone from president of UCB. Every single thing that they presented was a setup. And they would come on campus and kids would be eating their lunch--if they happened to have motorcycles--they'd pay them big money to get on their motorcycles and race around the tree, and say this is what is happening. It just--day after day after day. And so it mobilized people, who maybe normally wouldn't have been that upset about things. But it was an entire school movement. And so yes, there was lots of learning in that. [laughs].

[00:41:11.25] INTERVIEWER: As a Sister, did you feel free to participate? Was there any conflict?

[00:41:17.10] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: [laughs]. I and another Sister who was getting her doctorate in Anthropology felt free to participate. We were still in full habit at that time. So by the time we got home, the superior had seen it on television--had already called the provincial to say the terrible things that these Sisters are doing. So our freedom got a little restricted--[laughs]--to say the least. But we did what we could. [laughs].

[00:41:55.20] INTERVIEWER: You also mentioned Vatican II as starting to come into being during that time.

[00:41:59.20] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Yes.

[00:42:01.06] INTERVIEWER: How did that--in terms of religious life and the church, how did that impact you? What did you think about it--how did you engage with it?

[00:42:05.19] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Well, when I got back from Berkeley then, I had come--we had--my research group especially--we would talk about all the news that was coming out of Vatican II, and you know they would be asking me what do you think will happen. And they thought it was good--they thought it was wonderful, most of them. And so then I get back into the CSJ culture, so to speak and I find a tremendous division--the people who like it and the people who didn't like it. [laughs]. And so I came back to a community that was becoming more and more and more and more divided. And those were very difficult times--very painful times. Some Sisters began leaving at that time--either because they didn't like the changes or the changes were too slow. We--I give credit to Sister Mary Brigid [Fitzpatrick] and Sister Grace Ann [?], who were leaders--very wise leaders--during those years. And we had a lot of challenges. You know, the Sisters who signed the famous New York Times ad [re: conscience and abortion: "A Catholic Statement on Pluralism and Abortion", New York Times advertisement, 10/07/1984]--that people should be able to exercise their conscience in regard to abortion--you know they never advocated abortion--they just said the Catholic Church does not have the right to make laws for other people. But we were--I happened to be in leadership at that time with Sister Grace Ann, and we were told that we had to discharge one of our Sisters that signed that ad [Sister Judith Vaughan]. And we said no. We didn't know what the consequences might be. But we just stood by her and said Vatican II said you are to have an informed conscience and you are to act according to your conscience, and so the Church has a perfect right to inform but not to make laws that maybe are against someone else's conscience. And so we got a lot of canonical advice--[laughs]--and Sister Miriam Therese [Larkin (1930-2010)?] the major superior at that time was a big help. So we finally decided we'd just take the consequences and say no. We never heard again. And then of course, I was responsible for Arizona. We had sixty-five Sisters in Arizona at that time. I had to learn canon law to talk to the bishop why we're letting Sister Clare Dunn [(-1981) , Arizona State Rep.] run for the legislature. Sister Julie Marciacq was indicted by the federal grand jury--[laughs]--for--

[00:46:00.17] INTERVIEWER: I didn't know that.

[00:46:00.10] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: --harboring--you don't know her story? [laughs]. She was indicted by the federal grand jury because she worked in an immigrant center. And five of them that worked there were indicted. So we went through that whole process. Because the Arizona laws--no matter what you did you were against some law. It was like our Sisters in Delano--if you protested the grape vineyards, you had to be so many feet from this vineyard. Well, if you were this many feet from this vineyard, you couldn't be that many feet from--and that's how the immigration laws in Arizona were. So she was convicted of about thirteen counts, and the place where these people worked, they tried not to keep many records. They tried to do most everything by word of mouth. But they had to keep a few notes. So the night that the immigration raided the place and took all the documents, nobody was sure of what they had. We didn't know what evidence we were up against. And so I asked around, and talked to people about who could be a good lawyer to take this case. So we went to see him, and explained the situation. And he said yes, he would take the case. So I got a call about two weeks later, and he said, "Oh, I have good news. Come in." So Julie and I went in. And he says, "All you have to do is sign this paper and you're finished." We read the paper, and of course it says, "I promise never to aid undocumented people again." I said to Julie, "You're not going sign that are you?" She said, "No." So we said to him, "No, we can't sign that." I don't think he'd ever--I don't think he knew Sisters at all. So he pushes his chair back--he looks at us--and he gets up and leaves. [laughs]. So we're sitting there--so now what do we do? Maybe we go find another lawyer, I don't know. Anyway, he comes back and he says, "You have given me a challenge and I'm going to take it." So we said, "Thank you very much." And so he said, "I am going to--I know this guy in Phoenix"--the grand jury--"he just won a big case and he's on a roll to make a name for himself. He can beat me from here up"--[gestures at forehead]--"but I can beat him from here down. So I'm going to take your challenge." So sure enough, he interviewed a few of the undocumented people that Julie gave him his--the names. So he goes into court with a blank tape. [Gestures as if holding cassette tape.] And he says to this guy, "You drop these charges, or you're going to be sorry." The guy believed him and he dropped the case. [laughs].

[00:49:46.25] INTERVIEWER: So Sister Julie never had to--

[00:49:52.10] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Nope. She never ended up in jail. And then she went to Nicaragua. [laughs]. So yes, those years were very, very eventful years. [laughs].

[00:50:08.04] INTERVIEWER: Did you--it seems like--and I could be wrong--it seems like you would have been more on the side of embracing than this kind of advocacy role for Sisters--or maybe embracing more of the challenges of Vatican II. Would you describe yourself that way, or did you kind of move in that direction over time, or--?

[00:50:34.11] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: I would say I was a strong advocate--maybe too strong at some times. But, oh yeah. I think when they told us to go back to our original documents, and we discovered that we were an apostolic community forced into living a monastic life--that clarity, just that one thing, made a whole lot of sense to a lot of us. Yeah.

[00:51:14.02] INTERVIEWER: That really changes the tone for mission and ministry for the community at that time--

[00:51:18.08] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Um-hm. It does. Oh yeah. Definitely.

[00:51:23.18] KELBY THWAITS: Can I jump in here for a sec on this [unintelligible]. Do you consider yourself a rebel?

[00:51:29.07] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Uh-hm.

[00:51:30.09] KELBY THWAITS: And have you always considered yourself a rebel?

[00:51:32.21] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Oh yeah. Yeah. That's probably what appeals to me most about our community--the fact that they were founded subversively in France. [laughs].

[00:51:46.05] INTERVIEWER: Could you say more about the Founding--the subversive Founding?

[00:51:52.25] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Well, in France in the seventeenth century the situation was so terrible--the poverty and the--. And so the Church began these confraternities of men and confraternities of women of mercy--people who had some means to be able to help those who were desperate. And the time came when some of the women wanted a more formal commitment. And their--each of these confraternities had a priest companion like. And so this young Jesuit, Jean Pierre Médaille [(1610-1669)]--the women talked to him about being a religious community. And he said, "Well, you know, you have to live in an enclosure." Well, no, they weren't about to live in any enclosure. So he goes to the bishop, and he says, "I have this problem, Bishop. I have these women who want to be a religious community but are not willing to live in an enclosure." So the bishop says, well, we'll just have to pray--get inspired by the Holy Spirit." And so some months later he calls Jean Pierre and says, "I have an idea. I will write to Rome and I will say I'm willing to be the patron of this new community. I have a wing of a hospital--I have a hospital in Monastrell. I could convert a wing into a cloister and I'd be willing to be patron of this new group." Oh, so months and months pass, and finally comes this document with all the stamps from Rome, with all our blessings you can be the patron of this new community. Well, nobody ever lived in the hospital. [laughs]. They just kept on doing what they were doing before. [laughs]. So yes, I think I fit well into our history.

[00:54:13.22] INTERVIEWER: Kelby asked you if you feel--if you identify as a rebel. Would you put that into like a complete sentence for us.

[00:54:21.15] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Oh. Identify, yes. I identify as being a rebel and probably it's my ability to ask questions more. I'm not so inclined to out on the street with a placard or--I do march, sometimes. But it's either with a question or just simply not following the rule. Not making a big thing about it, just not doing it. [laughs].

[00:55:03.23] INTERVIEWER: Is there a time that you could give us another example when you didn't follow the rule?

[00:55:10.23] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Let's see. I guess mostly with regard to church things more than community things--although, probably some community things. You know, if it doesn't--my understanding of religion is to help unite--"re-link"--"re ligio"--"reunite". So if it's something that doesn't unite I just tend to not do it, whatever it is. But the question thing is probably more my style. Like I remember early days at the Mount--probably the late '50s or when Vatican II began. We were spending a whole evening talking about reading at the table while we were eating. Should we read this many minutes--should we--what should we read--finally I just said, "Maybe we could talk to each other. You think?" [laughs]. And that ended the whole thing and we started talking to each other. So it's kind of more that. [laughs].

[00:57:09.28] INTERVIEWER: Could you talk a little bit more about your time at the Mount so that we can capture just some stories when you--so you started to teach there after you were at Berkeley?

[00:57:19.23] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: No. I started before while I was studying at UCLA. First I did labs and then I did first Introductory Biology or something like that. That was--those were the Fire time [Bel Air Fire 1961]. That was another adventure. [laughs].

[00:57:52.20] INTERVIEWER: Would you say a little about the fire?

[00:57:55.18] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Well, at that time I was teaching Anatomy and Physiology to the postulants--and we had sixty postulants at that time. So I would walk down the hill and I would teach class down at the Carondelet Center, and then I would walk back up the hill. And that morning, I could see some smoke way, way off in the distance when I was walking up--but didn't think too much of it because it seemed so far away. But then the winds picked up, and the smoke started getting closer. And so we were watching out the window of what was the convent up there, and at time they were building the freeway [405 San Diego Freeway]. And so there was a huge clearing. So we had this false impression that there couldn't possibly be any danger because there was no way that the fire could come across that great distance. But the wind kept picking up, and picking up. And so we called all the resident students together,

and people--not a whole lot had cars, but a good number had cars in those days. And so we got--made sure--that every resident student got off campus. So we got them. Then as the fire got closer and closer we started making some preparations, you know, closing up all the doors and windows and everything that we could think of. And then we got a call from the House of Studies--could the Mount--by then we were driving, and so we had about six cars at the Mount. So we got a call--could we go down and help get the postulants and novices off campus--off there. So that was my first--[laughs]--experience. We drove--there was some house down there on Sunset that was going to accept them. So we kept driving groups down there. Then we got word that we were supposed to take them to St. Mary's Academy. So I remember Sister Eloise Therese [Mescall (1919-2001)] and I left at the same time. And we got our groups to St. Mary's Academy. And then we said, what do you think--what should we do now? By now we could see the fire was on this side. In fact, when I left with the last group of postulants, I had seen tree trunks at least two feet across being blown across the freeway by the wind storm. It was really something to see. And so we knew we couldn't go back to the Mount. So we said what do you think we should do? So we decided Martin of Tours down the hill might be a possibility. So Eloise and I are trying to stay together on the freeway coming back, but she got in a lane that the police sent one way--I was in a lane that they sent the other way. So fortunately, I was on the west side of the freeway, so I tried to get to Sunset--couldn't. Fortunately I knew all--a lot of back little roads. So I got up to Sunset on one of those little roads and I watched the police walking, and as soon as I thought she was far enough away, I just zoomed across the street and got to Martin of Tours. And there were about eight of us by then, that had managed to get to Martin of Tours. And then about two hours later we got a call from Loyola Marymount saying, "Our boys are offering their rooms if you need a place to stay tonight." And so we had two cars I think. We borrowed a car from some parishioner. [laughs]. And I was driving that one. We could not figure out how to get the interior lights off. [laughs]. We were punching every single button that we--it was a really fancy car. Anyway, we're driving down the freeway to Loyola with the lights on, and we had to stop and get some toothpaste and a few things for the night. And so we finally got to Loyola. And then we spent most of the night out on the point watching the Mount burn. [laughs].

[01:03:25.14] INTERVIEWER: Who was president at the Mount at that time?

[01:03:29.28] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Must have been Rebecca [Sister Mary Rebecca Doan (1910-1999)].

[01:03:33.23] INTERVIEWER: I think that's right.

[01:03:36.24] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: I think.

[01:03:38.02] INTERVIEWER: So were you part of the cleanup and getting things back--

[01:03:41.22] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Oh yeah. Well, Room 13, my lecture room down on the bottom floor there--you could not walk on the floor the next morning--because they had stored a bunch of wooden things underneath. The floor was so hot you could not go into that classroom. Yeah, there was a lot of cleanup. But again, out of that tragedy just came--those were some of the most--oh, how do I say--most unifying years. Students who lived not too far away gave up their beds--their rooms for the faculty--because the whole convent exploded. A log--one of those monstrous logs fell on the roof of the convent and the refrigerator blew up. And so the convent looked like it had been bombed. A few outside walls were standing but that was it. So--and the miracle of miracles--when we drove up the next day, here are two little bungalows out on the parking lot--wooden bungalows still standing in the midst of all of this other destruction--[laughs]--because the fire storm went by so fast, unless something fell right on the building it wasn't touched. It was amazing. So four of us crowded into those two little bungalows out on the parking lot. [laughs]. But it was a wonderful experience of solidarity.

[01:05:43.28] INTERVIEWER: Did you enjoy teaching at the college level?

[01:05:48.15] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Oh yeah. Yeah. I did. I really loved it. Again, like--I guess like Mary Gerald I taught more in the lab. You know, I always wanted to do my own labs. I could have had a lab assistant. But I found that there was--the personal contact was in the lab. So I valued that. No, I loved my time at the Mount.[laughs].

[01:06:24.16] INTERVIEWER: And then after your time in leadership which you shared some about--that's when you started to think about going to Chile? How did that--?

[01:06:33.00] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Well that's when--the thing about Chile is--when the letter came from the bishop of Talca, from Don Carlos [Don Carlos González Cruchaga] to our congregation asking for Sisters, I was just finishing my term on our leadership team. And I had to decide after ten years do I go back to the Mount, or do I start something new? [laughs]. And there was just something about that invitation that said, "This is it. Go for it." So I did. So I put my name in the hopper.

[01:07:19.29] INTERVIEWER: I read in something that you wrote that they asked you for that first year to just be present.

[01:07:26.29] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Right.

[01:07:28.04] INTERVIEWER: Could you share what that was--

[01:07:29.24] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: See this was during the dictatorship--the cruel dictatorship of Pinochet [Augusto Pinochet [(1915-2006)]. And so the bishop said, "I have just recently met some of your Sisters." And that was [Sister] Mary Ellen Kowalski and [Sister] Kathleen [??]--I'll think of it. They had been working in the mission office in San Diego. And one day their boss came in and asked them where they had had mission experience. And they said, "Well, we've never been overseas." And he said, "Would you like an experience?" And of course they said yes. [laughs]. And so he said, "Well, I have a friend--I have a connection in Talca, Chile if you'd be interested." So he wrote and his friend talked to the bishop, and the bishop said, "Sure, come." Well he was very, very impressed with the two of them. And he tried to get them to stay. They said, "No, Bishop, we'll go home and work for the missions." Anyway he said, "You go home and get some Sisters like you. That's what I need." I don't know--we don't know whether they did or they didn't. But two years later, he was in the States for a meeting--gets himself to San Diego--finds them and says, "Where are my Sisters?" And so they--he said, "You sit down"--he spoke English but he was embarrassed because it wasn't very good, but anyway--"You will write what I tell you. You write in good English and I will sign it and you will send it to your superior." So that's how we got invited to Chile. And he said, "I want two things. If you would live among the poor, there will be fewer disappeared because where there are foreign eyes the military are more careful. So just be there. And secondly, please do not do or give things to my people. They've been colonized for five hundred years--they think that everything that comes from outside is better. I need help helping them discover their own talents. So if there aren't Chileans willing to do it--to take responsibility--don't do it." So that's how we went to Chile--having no idea what we would [gestures air quotes] do. [laughs]. Just be present. And that was not really understood here. Because you always got missioned to "do" something. So we were constantly being asked, "Yes, but what do you do? What do you do?" Well, we accompanied the people. "Yes, but what do you do?" It was not understood. [laughs]. And besides, imagine--telling Americans--North Americans--not to "do"? You'd see things you could easily fix or do, but we just got in the habit of saying, "And who are we going to work with? And who are we going to work with?" And so we got involved in just marvelous, marvelous things. [laughs].

[01:11:06.18] INTERVIEWER: Would you share about one of those things you got involved with?

[01:11:10.05] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Well, one personal that I got involved in--the diocese had just begun a program--catechetics program for children with limitations--either psychological or physical--because they couldn't go to the regular catechism classes. And so these parents had asked for help. And there were about eight parishes who had just begun this special ed program. And so the couple that was responsible in our area came to visit one day, and they said, "Could you please join us?" So I said, "I would be happy to. I've not worked with this type of child before." "Oh," they said, "don't worry. We know our children. If you would just be with us we would be acceptable." And so I said, "How--why?" "Well, because if you have a child with a limitation it's because you sinned. You're being punished." So they hide the children away. And the Church doesn't want them even in church. So if a Sister would just be part of this it would give us some credibility. So, "Sure, I can do that." So I got involved--I got involved with the first communion class. Well then they made the first communion--they couldn't belong to other youth groups, so we formed a youth group. We invented stuff for a youth group. Then it's confirmation time, and so they do confirmation.

Then they still want to continue, so then we invent something else to make a youth group. Well, about the third--no the second year I was there, we had a weekend retreat for the teachers in the program. And we started sharing stories about some of these children. And I already knew two that had been raped by either their tia [Sp. aunt] and uncle or friend or somebody and had given birth. We had one we knew--younger woman--sleeping under the bridge. We knew several who were like slaves in an older brother's home, having to work in the home. And these stories started coming out. And so at the assembly, when we all got back together, I remember this man standing up and saying, "Well, it seems like we're called to more than just teach catechism." And you know it was like a spark just united--ignited people's energy. And so somebody else said, "Well, I'm going to go talk to the Bishop and see what he'll do." Somebody else said, "I have a friend on the city council. I'm going to go talk to him and see what he'll do." And in three months we were running a home for these children--because they contacted a guy who was caring for his elderly mother in a big house, and they talked him into letting us use the bedrooms in the big house for three of these children. And we found a woman to volunteer to accompany them. And so then of course word gets out. There's nothing south of Santiago for these children--nobody has anything. So word gets out. We start getting phone calls from everywhere. We have this child that needs this and needs this and needs this. So we formed an associate group. Some of the parents who were cooperating were professional people that had contacts. And so we were able to raise some money to rent a house. Well then we had six. And so then we had to find more women volunteers to take care of them--they're all girls at this point. So we have a house now. So then there's this priest--wonderful guy working with prostitutes in Talca. He said, "I have contact with an organization in Luxembourg. They love to build houses. You write a proposal. I'll translate it. I'm going on a home visit--I'll talk to them." So we did. And so here comes a check to build a house. Well, now we go back to the Bishop and we go back to the city council, because you can't build a house in the air. So we get land from both of them. [laughs]. It's--you know, it's so easy in Chile. Here, to try and do anything it seems like there's so much red tape. There, it's possible to just do it. Anyway, we get the land. We chose the land from the city because it was in a little bit safer area. Okay. So we now have land, we build a house. We now have twelve. So now we have to have more house mothers. They come from Luxembourg--two of the representatives--because they have other projects in Latin America. They are very impressed. So before they leave we have a check for a second house. We don't even have money to run the first house yet. But the men need the work, so we build a second house--we have land, so we build a second house. [laughs]. The house was empty for two years. We finally get enough money to open the second house. Now we have twenty-four. Then comes--three years later--a letter from Luxembourg with a check with an apology--"We can only send you money for half of the house, but we promise to send the rest next year." So, build a third house. So things like that, that we got involved in, have just grown and grown and grown. And the children--I visit a lot--it's called "Hogar Belén"--"Belén's house". "Oh, Sister, when you get old, you come here, we'll take good care of you." It is such a loving, loving place. And it just grows and grows and grows to meet the needs. And they are acceptable. The community has changed their whole idea. A mechanic who learned sign language in order to take on one of the young men--oh we have boys now, in another house--to take on one of the young boys as an apprentice who's working with him now. And so the whole community is involved. [laughs].

[01:19:03.02] INTERVIEWER: That story of that growth--to me has echoes of the early Sisters.

[01:19:08.10] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Yes. Uh-hm. Yeah. And the whole mentality that it's--we don't have to do it. We need to partner and cooperate and encourage what's already there. [laughs]. I mean it just seems so much simpler. [laughs].

[01:19:38.05] INTERVIEWER: [Director's comments]. [Cut.]

[01:20:07.13] INTERVIEWER: How long did you live in Chile?

[01:20:14.00] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: I was in Chile a little over twenty-five years--from the '80s until 2013.

[01:20:22.18] INTERVIEWER: And were there other Sisters there with you?

[01:20:25.14] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Oh yes. Four of us went together--two from Los Angeles province, one from St. Paul, and one from St. Louis. And then different--at one time we had Sisters

from every single province and every single vice-province. [laughs].

[01:20:44.25] INTERVIEWER: What were some of the other things from that time that you would want us to know about, or stories you'd like to--things you were involved in.

[01:20:56.11] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Well, things that some other Sisters were involved in. Like Sister Eileen--"Elena"--[Smits aka Sr. Rita Bernard (1935-2012)], who went with me in the beginning--she very early got involved in women's groups. The Sisters--the Maryknoll Sisters in Santiago had a very, very good program for self-development. And so she went up with Sister Marie Loyola [Sanders (1914-1996)]--the two of them went up to see what they could learn about--because one of the bishop's hopes was that people could be developed and learn to appreciate their talents and their gifts. So we saw that as a possible way. So she went with Marie Loyola to learn about those groups. And while she was there, she met this Chilean woman--second grade teacher--who was very, very involved as a teacher--a moderator--of these groups. And [Asunción] offered to come every other Saturday. Now that was a five hour trip in those days, because there was no freeway. She offered to come every other Saturday to do groups in our poblacion [Sp. population]. And so Elena and about eight women participated in that first group with her, and then she trained them to be monitores of other groups. And that just grew and grew and grew throughout the whole poblacion. Women who had never had any hope of much of anything--they would be challenged--when they would say, "You know I can't go to school"--"Well, why?"--"Because my husband wouldn't let me." "Well, have you ever asked him? If you talk to your children, what would your children think?" "Oh, I don't know." I mean, just motivating them to take one little step at a time. A woman who had been in an abusive--several were--in abusive marriages--who would accept her in your home if she leaves this abusive situation? Getting safe place ahead of time. Just all kinds of things like that. That really just made a huge, huge difference. The other thing was our involvement with the diocesan synod. They second year--third year we were there, the Bishop decided to have a diocesan synod. And so we helped organize many, many of those discussion groups--and as well as contributed to them--you know, trying to ask some questions to provoke some new ideas. And then Sister Rose Mary Haley [(1924-2012)] who came with us was a nurse. And there were no services anywhere near us. There was no clinic, anything. So she started visiting the homes and doing just simple things like blood pressure and trying to encourage them not to use the open little brazeros [Sp. braziers or charcoal stove] inside the house--explaining why--explaining about carbon monoxide, et cetera. And then as she met different ones, picking out some women that she knew were able to work with her. So she very early formed a little group, and we wrote some grants to get just simple things like blood pressure cuffs that they could use--and she taught them cleaning wounds, and soon she had a whole team that would go out and do this kind of work.

[01:25:30.20] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Then later--a little later--the what do you call it--well, it's a women's and men's religious--it's not separate like here, like LCWR [Leadership Conference of Women Religious] and the men's. In Chile the religious group is just all one. They had a committee on Peace, Justice and Ecology. And one of the Maryknoll Sisters was on this commission, and she said, "You know during the dictatorship we've done all kinds of things for Peace and Justice. But we've never done anything on Ecology." So somebody told her that I was a biologist. So she invited me to come and see what we could do. So we formed an eco-spirituality group. We were like an itinerant group in the beginning. We just went around to any place that invited us. We tried to show that Christianity and the new cosmology were not at odds with each other--that it was just how you interpreted the Bible--[laughs]--whether you could fit or not. We did workshops all over. But then we decided why don't we look for a place where we don't have to drag the cord to--we got really good at making labyrinths, at making cosmic circles, but you know it would be nice to have a place where you could leave it. [laughs]. So we worked hard at finding a place, and we finally found one up in the foothills of the Andes. It belonged to a Swiss community. They had been given it as a vacation home, but there was only one Sister there, and they were deciding what to do with it. So when we heard about that we said, "Oh, we'll help you decide." [laughs]. So then at least we had a place. In the meantime we also got a place from the diocese up in the foothills of the Andes where we could have a permanent setup for these kind of retreats. Then some of the people on this eco-spirituality ecology team were also members of Conspirando and Capacitar [International?]. Capacitar was started here in North America by Pat [Cane] and she has gone all over the world. It's very simple exercises of relaxation. It's also more advanced body work--but basically body work. And so with those connections, then we share this place with Conspirando, Capacitar and our ecology group. So we began giving all variety of different kinds of workshops there. And little by little, through the feminist magazine we were in contact with all Latin America. And so we



began getting people from every country in Latin America coming to these workshops. About the fifth year of that we said, "Look, some of you have come twice, some of you have come three times. You're perfectly capable of doing this in your own country. If you want help, one of us will come and help, but we are not going to--" we had gone to many countries before that--"you know, we'll come and help but this time you do it." So that was another chance to even get more Latin American countries. [laughs]. And so those were the kind of things that were just very, very life giving for me. I love to travel, so. [laughs].

[01:30:09.20] INTERVIEWER: I wanted to talk a little bit more about your interest in spirituality and some of the retreats--have you continued some of that work back here in the States?

[01:30:19.07] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Yes. You know we were--in our Maryknoll preparation program there was an emphasis on mission-to-mission in both directions. So not to just think about leaving here and going somewhere else, but to be aware of what we learned somewhere else that we could bring back here. So yes. All those years of eco-spirituality workshops, I just learned so, so much. I also learned a lot from the campesinos [Sp. peasant; country person; farmer]. When I was in Curepto [Chile] we had twenty-six base communities out in the hills. And we would have little groups of Bible reflection and I just remember the great wisdom. Like one day, the secretary in the parish and I went--were accompanying a little Bible group in one of the far away communities. And so the theme was "images of God". And so we talked about all the images of God that they knew from the Bible. And then I asked, "If you could choose any image for God, what would you choose?" Of course there's long silence because nobody wants to be wrong or make a mistake. Finally a woman spoke up and she said, "Well, I could think of God as a mother. Somebody who takes really good care of me, that really cares about me, that wants me to be successful, that wants me to be happy, and--". So you see the heads nodding and so we say to her, "That's wonderful. That's a really good image." And then there's silence again. [laughs]. Finally this guy speaks up and he says, "Well, my image would be a little bit different. I imagine God as the other buey [Sp. ox]--because God and I work together in the field all day long. We carry the same yoke. And I read somewhere in the Bible that says, 'My yoke is sweet and my burden is light', and I like that." I thought what wisdom! So yeah, I learned a lot. [laughs].

[01:33:20.17] INTERVIEWER: How would you answer that question today?

[01:33:23.17] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Oh today, who is my God? Well, as a scientist my God has just pretty much become love energy. I don't very often--once in a while, if I need to climb on his lap, he's a good Father. But I don't usually use an anthropocentric image. I just think of God as this strong attractor. [laughs].

[01:33:58.01] INTERVIEWER: Since you've--what was the transition like coming back to the States for you. Was that difficult?

[01:34:05.13] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Oh yes. [laughs]. Yeah, it's still difficult. I don't--I just see us so--oh, focused on ourselves--both in community and in public life. It seems more and more it's all about us. I just feel like we've lost our attraction for the dear neighbor. Yeah. So, it's hard.

[01:34:50.08] INTERVIEWER: Are there places that give you hope that you see in terms of the dear neighbor?

[01:34:56.25] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Um--well, you know I see a lot of individual Sisters doing wonderful things. I just wish as a congregation we would make some kind of real commitment.

[01:35:17.04] INTERVIEWER: Since we're probably sharing a lot of this with students, is there a way that you would reach out to them--or what of the charism or mission that would help them to get more engaged with the dear neighbor that you would want them to know? You've met many of our current students.

[01:35:39.28] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Yes, I meet a lot. We have a nice relationship with the house next door to us where the students live. Well, I guess not only to students but to everybody who shares our charism of unity and reconciliation--I can't think of anything that's more needed in our world today. So yes. I'm not worried about what form the life will take, but I just--I know that there are people all

over that share that. [laughs]. Yeah.

[01:36:28.22] INTERVIEWER: What's--are you in semi-retirement now? What kind of ministries are you still involved with?

[01:36:36.14] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: [laughs]. What do I still get involved in? [laughs]. Well, I guess my favorite one right now is the Presentation Learning Center in Watts. When I was a kid growing up here, Watts was almost entirely Afro-American. And over the years it has become half immigrant and half Afro-American. And about, oh I guess, maybe twelve years ago, when the Presentation Sisters couldn't staff that school any longer, and there were only a couple of them, they asked the pastor if they could use the convent for a Learning Center--because they identified that as a great need. And he said yes. So they converted all the bedrooms to little classrooms--the big dining room and living room into a big classroom--and gradually developed this wonderful program. We have five levels of English grammar, three levels of English conversation, all the courses for GED in Spanish, and all the courses for citizenship for those who are wanting to become citizens--and then just all kinds of elec--what we'd call electives. I mean there's jewelry, there's Zumba dancing, there's painting, there's crochet, there's oh "sastre" [Sp. tailoring]--what do you call it, clothes-making--

[01:38:26.20] INTERVIEWER: --fashion--

[01:38:28.18] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: --fashion, yeah. And the women who do--it's all volunteer--the whole thing. The women who do that--they can just bring a picture out of a magazine and say, "I want to make this dress." And they'll cut out the pattern for them. And you were there, at the end of the year when they have their fashion show. They are so proud of what they make. And they're just beautiful, beautiful things. So yeah, that's probably what gives me the most life right now. I translate at Alexandria House also for the Spanish-speaking, and I'm learning a lot about homelessness.

[01:39:16.25] INTERVIEWER: Is there any way you would sum up what has been most joyful about religious life?

[01:39:23.15] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Oh, well, let's see. First of all, having Sisters--that I never had in my family. The wonderful opportunity to have different experiences--education, travel. Feeling like I made the right choice. [laughs].

[01:40:06.22] INTERVIEWER: You said you wanted--I'm so struck by what you said early on that you wanted to be free and you didn't want to be someone's possession.

[01:40:13.08] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: [laughs]. Yeah.

[01:40:14.17] INTERVIEWER: Has it been a life of freedom?

[01:40:14.29] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Yeah. Definitely. I mean, most people don't think about religious life like that, but that's what it's been for me. Definitely.

[01:40:26.11] INTERVIEWER: Could you just say the word--freedom?

[01:40:27.25] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Freedom.

[01:40:29.00] INTERVIEWER: Sister Margaret is there anything else that you reflected on that I haven't asked you about that you wanted to share?

[01:40:36.04] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: I don't think so. I think--oh maybe--you know you asked me about high school. Oh I think one of the highlights at the Mount besides enjoying my teaching was helping to found the Doheny campus.

[01:40:58.08] INTERVIEWER: Oh, would you say a little about that? Yeah.

[01:41:00.14] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Well, I was on the faculty when the archbishop called Sister Rebecca [Doan] and said, "Could you work with Marymount and Loyola to develop a masters program if I let you use the Doheny campus?"--or Doheny buildings. And so, she tried. Marymount dropped out because they did not have faculty to contribute. And Rebecca sensed that Loyola wanted to be in control or else, and she was not about to go with that. So she called the cardinal and said, "We don't think it's going to work. Not going to happen." So she called about five of us together and said, "I don't want to lose this opportunity. What do you think? We can't go it on our own. We don't have enough to do it ourselves." And so we talked about it, and we said, "We don't think we need a masters program. Given the location, we think we need an AA program. People who otherwise would not have a chance to go to college." So she called the cardinal and told him--offered our suggestion--and he said, "It's yours." [laughs]. So the five of us got together and put together a little baby AA program. [laughs]. And this is what it's grown into.

[01:42:38.18] INTERVIEWER: Sounds like you're proud of that.

[01:42:42.23] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Oh yeah. Definitely.

[01:42:45.25] INTERVIEWER: Can you say more about the neighbor that you feel--who you were able to open up that education to?

[01:42:54.04] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Well, people from--we did two television programs, and so people heard about it. And so little by little we actually--we would come down and we would just be here for people who wanted to come and find out about it. And so little by little, the people from around here came and asked about it--about the opportunity and what it was all about. And then we started interviewing some young people from around the neighborhood--around the area--and they were all first generation. Nobody in their family had ever gone to college before. So they were afraid, they were scared they wouldn't succeed, you know, all that kind of thing. And so about maybe--I don't remember--the first year--anyway it was very soon we had this huge influx of Cubans [Cuban Teacher Training masters program [(1960s-1970s)]. And so all of a sudden we did have a masters program--even though we hadn't designed it--which kind of overshadowed the original AA program--because we had all these professional people needing credentials here. So then, yes--then we did very soon have both things. But it was small, and so we were able to--we had enough faculty to handle at least that aspect of it. So--yeah. It just was responding to what was happening. [laughs].

[01:44:45.13] INTERVIEWER: Thank you. Do you have anything?

[01:44:50.08] KELBY THWAITS: Really, you covered so much that--and I got to kind of have--I sidetracked us a little bit in some areas that I really wanted to make sure we touched on for the material that we have. Is there anything else that you could contribute to your--the conflict or the challenge that you had at merging a life of science--as a scientist--and religious life. You have your--you've shared very eloquently your own beliefs and your own feelings. But some of the other fellow religious did not necessarily share your viewpoints. And so that you had some friction some times, and you found clever ways to support other Sisters or to get around those issues. How do you reconcile a life of science and religion personally, and what were some of the biggest challenges from others that you had. It seems that you're very comfortable with that, but maybe other people have not felt so comfortable with some of your viewpoints. But I'm just curious if you could share a little bit more about that. You've already done such a great job.

[01:46:10.02] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Well a lot of it came from belonging to this eco-spirituality group in Chile. A whole lot of it. Because we started the group for ourselves. We were reading--because--well not all of us read English but the majority in the first group were bilingual. And so we were reading all the Thomas Berry [CP, PhD (1914-2009), ecotheologian], "The Green Dragon"--what's his name--ah--he was up at Holy Names--

[01:46:50.17] INTERVIEWER: Oh, Matthew Fox [(1940-) priest and theologian]? No.

[01:46:53.11] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Yeah. Oh. Brian Swimme [(1950-), professor California Institute of Integral Studies, author of "The universe is a green dragon: Reading the meaning in the cosmic story"]. And so we were both translating and sharing among ourselves, trying to put all this together. And

then when we started doing the workshops we were responding to the exact same questions from other people. And so we would just share our stories of what we came to, and then they would share their stories. So now that I'm back here, I found the same difficulty. I not only teach at Presentation Center, but I go on Sunday mornings--I accompany the parents of the first communion children at nine o'clock, and I accompany the parents of the confirmation class at eleven o'clock. And I always have them write out on the cards--I say, "You know, this is a class for you, not for me. So you determine the content. What questions or doubts do you have that you were afraid to ask, and what are the questions that your children are asking that you don't feel competent in answering?" I get tons of questions about religion and science. In fact, just last week, on one of the cards, it said, "Why are you so concerned about relating science and religion? Don't you believe in God?" [laughs]. So I'm finding here what we had twenty years almost in Chile. So yeah, I'm able to use a whole lot of that. And they're both Spanish communities. So I can use some of the same terms here as I used there--as I learned there--to try to help these parents who--they're absolutely unable to communi--and they're just desperate. "My child is losing his faith. My child is losing his faith." So I'm trying to separate faith from a whole list of doctrines--that it's a belief that God is here, present. It's not a whole list of things I have to say yes to. And then I'm trying to say if they're religious, the call is to "re unite", and so I'm trying to reunite the science that their children are learning [gestures to right] with what they believe over here [gestures to left] that they think has nothing to do with this. [laughs]. It's a real challenge. A real challenge. So pray that I can come up with examples--[laughs]--suggestions. But we had a wonderful--she's a--she's from Holland--she's a lay missionary--she came to Chile about the same time as I did, and she's a theologian. And she and I developed some--Chileans are great at role-playing. They have no inhibitions at all. So we changed the whole Bible stuff to role-playing. And they can get into it completely--taking the roles of the things--of the people in the stories. And so we use that in our poblacion with great success. I can't do it very well because we're stuck in a church with pews--they're all facing the back of somebody else. So I haven't found out a way to use that yet, but that's how we introduce some of these topics. Oh, we had one wonderful workshop. We assigned every little group a different creation myth from all over the world. Well, the group--they were mostly Venezuelans, as I remember--Venezuela did an absolutely fabulous presentation on our creation myth--on the Adam and Eve creation myth. They were so good. And it just shows you how the bad interpretation of a myth can do so much damage to a culture. So--[laughs].

[01:52:23.12] KELBY THWAITES: That's great. That's so wonderful. I just have to say I love your--the concept of considering yourself as a carbon atom and praying as a carbon atom.

[01:52:35.09] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Yeah.

[01:52:36.12] KELBY THWAITES: Or considering how do you unify or bond hydrogen and oxygen. And that same concept of unification of the elements which creates something that's greater than the sum of their parts--

[01:52:50.20] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Exactly.

[01:52:51.07] KELBY THWAITES: --just like unifying people. So wonderful.

[01:52:54.22] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: And we are so obsessed with building a structure. It just makes me sick. Nature does not build structures first. You have a strong attractor, you have union, and out of that union comes new birth. I mean it's just so obvious to me. [laughs]. So yeah, it is frustrating. [laughs].

[01:53:23.15] INTERVIEWER: She says with a laugh. [all laugh].

[01:53:26.04] KELBY THWAITES: Almost everything with a laugh, right?. This has been just a pleasure. Thank you.

[01:53:31.15] INTERVIEWER: Thank you so much. Thank you so much, that was wonderful.

[01:53:34.19] SISTER MARGARET MARY O'ROURKE: Thank you.

[01:53:38.02] End of interview.

